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CAD Bulletin No. 2005-01

To: Eligible Telecommunications Carriers

From: Derek D. Davidson, Director, Consumer Assistance Division

Subject: Annual Lifeline/Link-Up Verification Process

Date: May 18, 2005

Chapter 294 requires Eligible Telecommunications Carriers, and any other carrier offering Lifeline or Link-Up service, to verify a customer's eligibility for the programs on an annual basis. Section 5 of Chapter 294 requires each carrier to submit annually a list of its customers who are receiving Lifeline or Link-Up benefits to the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) and the Community Action Program (CAP) agencies for verification of continued customer eligibility. However, both the carriers and the assistance agencies have experienced problems with the eligibility verification process. DHHS was unable to read the data provided by one carrier; the carriers used different methods to submit the lists to DHHS and the CAP agencies; and the review by the CAP agencies was time consuming because it was done manually, resulting in lengthy response times to carriers. These problems highlighted the need to improve the process used to verify customer eligibility for the Lifeline/Link-Up programs.

As a result of these problems, the CAD met with various interested parties on May 6, 2004, to develop a more automated process for verification of customer eligibility in the Lifeline/Link-Up programs. Participants at the meeting included representatives of Verizon, UniTel, Tidewater, the Telephone Association of Maine, the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA), and the Energy Council of the Community Action Program Agencies.

After discussing each of the impediments to a timely and efficient eligibility review, the participants developed a revised annual verification process. Under the new process, carriers will submit their lists for eligibility verification to DHHS in a common electronic format (an Excel spreadsheet on CD-ROM). Participants agreed that the spreadsheet would include the following columns:



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Column A	"A" number
Column B	Social Security number
Column C	Telephone number
Column D	Customer name
Column E	Address field #1 (apartment number)
Column F	Address field #2 (Street)
Column G	City, state, zip

Carriers will mail their CD-ROM to DHHS (11 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333-0011). DHHS will remove the names of individuals receiving assistance from DHHS from the spreadsheet and forward the CD-ROM to MSHA (353 Water Street, Augusta, ME 04330). MSHA will then perform the second review, rather than the CAP agencies, because MSHA has all of the data for LIHEAP eligible customers. MSHA will remove the names of LIHEAP eligible customers and return the CD-ROM containing the revised list to the carrier.

As with the former verification process, customers whose names appear on the revised list will be removed from the Lifeline/Link-Up programs. The carriers will continue to send a letter to each customer advising them that they are no longer eligible for Lifeline or Link-Up assistance and asking the customer to contact the carrier if the customer believes they are still qualified for Lifeline or Link-Up.

Because the HEAP program year is from October 1 through September 30 and HEAP applications are typically accepted through April of each year, it was suggested that carriers schedule their annual verification for the end of July to ensure that all HEAP applications are processed at the time of verification. It was anticipated that carriers would be ready to implement the new process by July 2005, and Verizon confirmed that it expects to use the new verification process beginning this July. Confirmation has not been received from other carriers at this time.

The CAD suggests that all carriers participating in the Lifeline/Link-Up programs use the revised process for Lifeline/Link-Up eligibility verification. The revised process is more efficient and accurate and less resource intensive than the previous verification process. The CAD expects that the revised process will result in significant savings for all parties involved, and appreciates the efforts of all parties to improve this process.

Carriers with questions about this bulletin may contact me at (207) 287-1596 or by e-mail at derek.d.davidson@maine.gov.

cc: DHHS, MSHA, TAM, CAP Agencies